li Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

Birth

Birth takes place in the bush, some distance from the hamlet, in the presence of female relatives of the woman and of her husband. If the child is stillborn, or miscarried, it is buried in the bush. The husband and wife must abstain from sexual intercourse for some months, until a special ritual intercourse is performed. A man who breaks this taboo is liable to contract a fatal disease, *kusasaga*. Difficult births are attributed to: (*a*) a curse spoken by a matrilineal relative—this is made effective by the intervention of the ancestors, and to remove it it is necessary to perform a rite making clear that no malice is borne; (*b*) the adultery of the woman or her husband, in which case confession will save the woman from dying; and (*c*) sorcery.

If a child is born alive it is brought to the hut of the mother or one of her female relatives, where it is secluded until its naming ceremony, about six days later. Only after the naming is the child considered to be a member of society. A second child should not be born while the first is still suckling, i.e. for about two years. When the child is about four or five months old it is ritually immunized against the dangers of sexual activity, and the parents may resume relations. Elaborate magical precautions are taken to ensure the child's survival. Children sleep with their mother, the boys until they are old enough to go to the boys' dormitory, and the girls until marriage.[1]

Initiation

The yearly initiation ceremonies, *unyago*, are the principal cultural institution of the Yao. That for the boys, *lupanda*, is the most important, and may only take place under a chief or superior village headman, whereas a girls' initiation ceremony may take place under an ordinary headman. The right to hold a boys' initiation ceremony therefore becomes a mark of status which is jealously disputed.[2] The right is expressed as 'having a *citeko*'. A *citeko* is the small basket in which the special sacrificial flour is carried.

Yao carry out initiation between the ages of seven and eleven, whereas generally in East Africa it is postponed until puberty.[3] In response to requests from the headmen the chief appoints the time and place of the boys' initiation ceremony for a group of villages. It is held at the end of the dry season, before the bush is burned. Each initiate is accompanied by a sponsor, *nkwaui*, who may be a brother, uncle, or friend. Before they set out for the place appointed to be *lupanda*, they all assemble before the chief to be anointed with millet-flour specially prepared by his head wife. The word *lupanda* refers to a forked stick over which the sacrificial flour is poured. This stick is planted at the place of assembly, the *masakasa*. The boys, their sponsors, and the master of ceremonies, *n'mkiwa*, are accompanied with dancing as far as *masakasa* by their friends. The next day the initiates go to a spot in the bush, where the circumcision (formerly only an incision) is performed, and remain in the bush school, *ndagala*, for about two months, until the wounds are completely healed. The Yao circumcision rite is said not to have been introduced by the Arabs.[4]

During these weeks the boys are subjected to rigorous discipline and instructed in various skills and tribal lore. They sleep in long dormitory huts, with partitions dividing the boys of different villages from each other. The chief appoints the day for

[1] Watson, 1926, pp. 144–5.
[2] Stannus and Dewey, 1913, p. 119.
[3] Duff, 1903, p. 310.
[4] Livingstone, 1874, p. 81.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

brother, is called *anyene mbumba*, or 'the warden of the sorority-group'. As one would expect among a matrilineal people, the link between a man and his mother and sisters is strong. But it is the link with his sister that is strongest. She relies on him for protection, particularly when she becomes ill, but also in her relationships with her husband. Her brother will be her junior marriage surety, and he will give the consent which will allow a man to marry her. Also a woman's brother will have to consult the diviner and find the medicines when she or her children sicken. In times of distress, as, for example, if her crops have failed, she will appeal to her brother for help. Similarly the man is dependent on his sister in a number of subtle ways. He can always rely on her for hospitality, and is able to get a meal from her if he needs it. But his dependence on his sisters for prestige is much more important. The significance of this will emerge when we see the *mbumba* organization in the light of the segmentation and fission of the lineage. A man can only found a new village if he has the full support of his sisters. A sister also plays a most important rôle at the birth of his children. She represents him both at the first fœtal-quickening ceremony and at the birth of his child, when she listens to the birth-pang confessions of his wife.[1]

At the same time the relations of sister and brother are restricted by custom. A man must never appear too familiar with his sister, especially in sexual matters. He may not, for example, sleep in the same hut as she does; if she is away and he sleeps in her empty hut he must not make his bed in the place where she usually sleeps. He may not even sit on her sleeping mat. Authentic cases of incest with a sister are extremely rare, whereas I recorded three or four cases of father–daughter incest while I was in the field. Supposed cases of brother–sister incest are recounted and discussed widely. This is understandable because a man who is suspiciously familiar with his sister is suspected of being a sorcerer, since it is widely believed that a sorcerer usually obtains the power that he needs for the performance of his dire deeds by sleeping with his sister. The riddle of the initiands—'What is the sweetest fruit which may not be tasted?' Answer, 'Your sister'—neatly reflects the attitude of the Yao.

The close link of brother and sister is also reflected in the

[1] The significance of this is explained in Chap. VII, p. 185.

3: Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

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40. Gwera kwala ntukuta/
Lying on the rock, heat!

This is a slang expression which in full would read, "It is nice and warm lying on a rock in the sun, but it is not so comfortable as being in bed in company with your wife; you can go on waiting but you won't get anything." This might even be said to a dog, watching as a dog will, every morsel of food lifted to its master's mouth.

41. Kubapilila mwai pa mbiru/
To have hopes of water for maggots!

It is a custom before lying down to sleep on the floor mat, to take it up and pour boiling water on the earth floor to kill any blood-sucking maggots (Congo floor-maggot, *Analecrosopis*). If you see a pot cooking on the fire, you naturally think there is food being prepared but you may be disappointed; it may only be the pot for heating the water to kill the maggots. The saying is thus used to a man who has made an assignation and is disappointed but goes on waiting.

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42. Kulumu ngwa/
To bite cockroach-like!

The cockroach is described by natives as going up to what it will eat, remaining quiet for some moments, and then suddenly taking a bite. This is said of a man who comes up to you smiling and then hits you a hard blow.

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Among the Yao as among other tribes that I have previously mentioned,[1] signs of salutation to a superior are made by clapping the hands or patting the breast or buttock with one hand, at the same time crouching down. A woman will go off the path and kneel, looking away from a superior passing along the roadway.

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A person going by the door of a hut where others are sitting, will say "*Kwenenge kuno!* At the door here." Passing behind anyone, he will say "*Ku-nyu mwi!* At the back!" Meeting anyone on a path, a man will simply say, "*Iche*, here," adding perhaps, "*Ku-shishi!* all is well!" A chief or headman on returning to his village after a journey, is greeted by the women with trilling of the tongue (*Ku-lulula*).

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Man and wife do not greet each other in the morning. The wife rises first and draws water and places it in the hut for the husband's use but nothing may be said.

When a visitor is entertained and a chicken cooked for a repast, the "pope's nose" is always for the visitor. The right hand only is used in dipping into the common pot. A man of small importance, though replete, will go on making pretence of eating at a common meal by taking very small amounts so that his superior shall finish first, and rise and go away before him.

I may here add the words used by the Yao for the sounds made by various animals; they are interesting to compare with those of other languages:

[1] 'Notes on some tribes of British Central Africa,' *op. cit.*, p. 801-803.